

ANCIENT WINDSOR.

THE LIFE OF A CONNECTICUT TOWN.
THE HISTORY AND GENEALOGIES OF ANCIENT WINDSOR, a Connecticut Town, East Windsor, Son of Windsor, Plainfield, Windsor Locks and Ellington, 1635-1891. By Henry R. Stiles, A. M., M. D. Two volumes. Pp. vi, 950; ix, 567. (Price of Case, Lockwood & Brundage Company, Hartford.)

The study of local history and genealogy is a sign of mental health in the society which indulges it. It indicates that love of home, none too characteristic of the American people, has in a given case passed beyond the instinctive stage, has become intellectual and therefore reasonably permanent. A glance through the great volumes which Dr. Stiles has devoted to Ancient Windsor will suffice to show what has happened to the people of the neighborhood of which he writes, and to the multitude who from various parts of the world look back to Windsor as the starting point in America, and perhaps in what might, for lack of a better term, be called the family consciousness of their race and name. It is impossible to follow him through the history of the town, but even the student of European primitivism would be interested in the recurrence of a prehistoric invention shown in the following paragraph:

"The first houses were 'dwelling places' merely; these were substantially one and had no partitions or doors." In fact, such as are to be seen at the present day in newly settled parts of the West, their construction is thus described: "Beginning a few feet below the roof of the hill, a ladder was caressed a hole in the side of the proposed house, then up the earth at the sides and west end, on the embankment that made them lay a plate on which they rested the foot of the rafter. When the plate was covered with stones, there must have been dispensed with it. Instead of shingle, the roof was thatched with coarse grass, dried hay, and straw, and was probably made of thatch, boughs, and brushwood, split from short logs, and hung into shape. Only the east end and the roof of these structures appeared above ground." These were soon followed by the log cabin familiar to all pioneering east of the great plateau.

The town records of Windsor or Dorchester, as it was first called, previous to 1650 have not survived, and fragmentary knowledge of the doings of the settlers must be gained from other sources. But for ninety years after the first settlement there was scarcely an hour in which the inhabitants of the Connecticut Valley, especially of the frontier towns, could travel in the forests, walk in the fields, worship God in their churches, or lie down in their beds at night, without apprehension of an attack from their stealthy and remorseless foes. In the light of this fact, the record of the first court held at Newington (Hartford), April 26, 1630, by the commissioners appointed by Massachusetts for the colonies of the Connecticut is interesting. It was a minute of the trial of Henry Stiles, of Dorchester, on the complaint that he "or some of the servants had traded a place with the Indians for corn." Somehow the red men got firearms with suspicious ease in the earliest New-England settlements, just as they did in later times. A heavy fine was also imposed on any one who should "shoot off a gun without command from some magistrate or military commander," except in self-defense or "for the destroying of some wolf or such ravenous beast." This was in the time of King Philip's war. Some years later the offence was modernized as "shooting off one's mouth" was taken under the same heading, as may be inferred from the following vote:

1728-9. February 3, voted that any person of this meeting, or any other intended to be hidden hereafter for his or her sins, shall presume to speak in town meeting without the liberty of the Moderator, he shall pay a fine of twenty shillings to the town treasurer, as upon an affidavit.

Upon which the historian remarks drily: "Judging from the increased time the manners of the people had grown much worse since the similar vote in 1609-7." The penalty then was only one shilling. But the people of Ancient Windsor lived tall, especially of a Sunday. It might almost be suspected that nowhere else would it be possible to exhibit a chronicle with an affidavit blue ribbon.

May, 1727. George Brown in deacon in the Tewksbury church testified that when Mr. Daniel Fuller was at Tewksbury I was one of them that sought his settlement in the work of the ministry there, but perceiving great unmeasurableness of the people in that affair, and perceiving the shrewdness of his sermon, I told Mr. Fuller to apply himself to the ministry. And when he returned, he said, "I am sorry that I did not encourage himself about it, for he might gain distinguished persons." Mr. Fuller replied that he did not encourage himself about it, if they were but orthodox they were long enough for Piety.

The first mention of a church bell was in 1601, when the First Society acknowledged the gift of one from Henry Allyn and the next year voted to toll it as a token of respect for his memory. It was not until 1622 that Windsor Church "voted that two stores be purchased for the Meeting House in this Society." Before this reform, "mothers and grandmothers indulged in the luxury of foot-stoves, of course, warming the warmth. These footstoves were filled with coals from the hearth, covered with ashes, and retained their warmth through the morning service; the coals were renewed at noon by some general friend near the church." The first schoolroom ever named in the records of Windsor was Sam'l Stiles, in 1717. Her success must have been marked, for the next year it was voted that the "schools shall be kept by women in the summer until October."

Slavery was, in general, a mild disease in Connecticut. The imprisonment of slaves was prohibited in 1771, and steps subsequently gradually led up to the formal act of abolition in 1848. But "those of whatever age who were incapable to support themselves were still slaves, unless the town chose to release the owners." The winter added:

Such was old Sam'l in the family of Col. James Lincoln. She was born on Greenfield Hill, Fairfield County, Conn., and remained in the family of her Hebrew master until she was four years old, when she was given to Mrs. Anna Cushing, widow of Dr. John Cushing, of Windsor. At his death, in 1821, she became a household girl and charge committed to the especial care of Mrs. Anna Cushing, whose family she remained until her death, in 1857. The following anecdote is preserved:

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This was not the only form of festivity in old Windsor that may seem odd to readers of the present day. For example, when the Rev. Timothy Edwards

father of the learned Jonathan Edwards, was ordained as pastor of the church of Windsor Farms, soon afterward incorporated as the Second Church and society in Windsor, there was a curious sequel to the services of the day, says our historian:

"It will seem strange to many to know that the ordination was followed by a ball. Such however is the fact. Not long since there was a similar ordination at New Haven, and the original invitees sent to Captain Thomas Stonington and wife, urging their attendance at an 'ordination ball,' given at his own house, and signed by Timothy Edwards.

The massive volumes in hand are in one sense not novel. Dr. Stiles published much of the material which they contain as early as 1859. In 1883 he added a supplement. He frankly states that the first edition of 700 copies was published at a loss, and the same was true of a supplement, of which 150 copies were printed. He adds: "but, within the thirty years which have now elapsed since its appearance, American history and genealogy have assumed a new interest in the public mind; new fields in Windsor history have been explored by older sons of Windsor, and for the last fifteen years I have been in constant receipt of inquiries from antiquarians and others interested in tracing their family records, seeking to obtain copies of the work, urging me to issue a new edition, and offering for my use much new matter." The second volume, wholly devoted to genealogists and to the biographies of men who have become more or less renowned, shows that the circle of interest in old Windsor and its early families is hardly circumscribed even by the boundaries of the Nation in which it seems, map-wise, so small a part. Dr. Stiles has not had a few efficient helpers in his task. His own introduction to the history of Windsor from the discovery of the Connecticut River to the settlement of the town, that is, from 1614 to 1635, is followed by an elaborate study of the settlement by Jabez H. Hayden. Then comes the history of the evolution of a New-England town in a series of chapters, its topography, its deities, its wars, its legislation, its religion, its superstitions, its foibles, its social, mercantile and professional life.

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